

## Testimony on House Bill 4131

## Second Parent Adoption

## House Judiciary Committee

April 22, 2009

Good morning, Representative Meadows and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on House Bill 4131, which would provide for second parent adoption.

I am Linda Burghardt, Government Relations Director for the National Association of Social Workers – Michigan Chapter. I, however, am not speaking today in my professional capacity but rather as someone who was widowed when my son was five years old. I asked an attorney to explain to me what would have been the benefits of second parent adoption versus a guardianship arrangement if anything had happened to me when my child was a minor.

I was told that in a guardianship arrangement, the child does not have any rights to the guardian's inheritance, social security, or pension benefits or to child support from the guardian. Further, the guardian can withdraw at any time. If a second parent adoption law had been in place, and one of my parents or my sister, for example, had adopted my son as a second parent, he would have had immediate rights to all those benefits just as they are available in all two-parent households.

Admittedly, under a guardianship arrangement, my son would have been eligible for health coverage, but unless I were missing, dead, incarcerated or had otherwise left my child to live with another person (abandoned him) without providing for his support, the law would not have allowed the appointment of a guardian. Therefore, if I had been fired or laid off from work and could not afford health coverage for my son under COBRA or some other plan, my options would have been to hope that my child did not become sick or injured because he would not receive any care other than emergency care or that some taxpayer funded plan would be available or give up my child and my parental rights so he could be adopted.

I do not find any of these options palatable and, fortunately, never had to choose one, but I wonder how many single mothers and fathers are struggling with these decisions every day, especially in such disastrous economic times. I cannot help but think that second parent adoption would make it a little easier for parents to provide for and protect the physical, emotional, mental, and financial well-being of their children, to ensure their future, and give them a warm, loving environment where they can feel safe and secure if the unthinkable should happen to a parent. After all, protecting and providing for our children is the most important thing we will ever do in our lives.

Thank you again for letting me speak to the merits of House Bill 4131. I would be happy to answer any questions you have.

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